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## 'I didn't think I would be emotional until I started saying the oath' – emotionalising and ritualising citizenship

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### ABSTRACT

The quote in the title from a newly naturalised citizen emphasises that taking an oath and affirming one's loyalty to a new country can be experienced as a surprisingly emotional matter. But how does the ritual transformation of migrant identities turn into an emotional experience? This paper explores primarily the emotional dimension of naturalisation rituals and the distributed agency involved in two concrete cases from Australia and Denmark. Although practical reasons may be considered to be the most important motivating factor when it comes to applying for citizenship, these are often mixed with a more identity-based perception of citizenship as a symbol of affiliation with the new society. And citizenship ceremonies become one of the occasions in which the symbolic and emotional dimensions of citizenship are enacted. Thus, the introduction of ceremonies in an increasing number of countries may be considered a step towards the emotionalisation of citizenship, in order to ensure cohesion, unity, and a sense of belonging, since the emotional significance of citizenship is considered to be a guarantee for loyalty and the desired civil awareness.

### KEYWORDS

Citizenship; naturalisation; ritualisation; emotionalisation; distributed agency

I think the oath was actually beautiful. I didn't think I would be emotional until I started saying the oath.

This quote from a newly naturalised Australian citizen emphasises that taking an oath and affirming one's loyalty to a new country can be experienced as a surprisingly emotional matter. How come? How are such transformations of migrant identities ritualised and emotionalised? This paper will explore the emotional dimension of naturalisation rituals and the distributed agency involved in two concrete cases. Citizenship ceremonies are forms of public or political rituals, which many states employ as a solution when facing the challenge of the increasing migration of the twenty-first century. With their stated purpose of creating a sense of belonging and loyal citizens, they must be interpreted within the context of the problematisation of migrant loyalties and transnational or hybrid identities. These dilemmas are often articulated within political discourses invoking security, integration, and national cohesiveness. However, the following discussion will not primarily address the political or discursive agenda or what the rituals communicate

for a wider audience.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it will focus on how these ritualisations of citizenship are practised and experienced by new citizens as matters of emotionalisation.

Within political science, approaches to citizenship are typically concerned with identifying distinctive models of citizenship. Following Soysal (2000), who argues that focusing our analysis on the proliferating sites of making and enacting citizenship will enhance our grasp of new dynamics and topographies of membership, this analysis focuses on the concrete enactments of citizenship during ceremonies. Citizen ceremonies are meant to foster a less ambiguous loyalty and identity in new citizens. Clearly, this is challenging as migrant identities are often ambiguous and do not correspond with the clear-cut national categories that are traditionally associated with citizenship, as a number of researchers have pointed out (e.g. Soysal 2000). Indeed, migrant identities are not characterised by ‘purity’, simplicity, or essences, but are instead more often associated with diversity and heterogeneity.

Thus, hybridity is a concept that is often highlighted as a possible way in understanding the complex interplay between a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds and contexts, of which an individual migrant is a part, and in relation to which he/she operates and creates new identities. This also indicates that citizenship and identity should be studied by focusing on the ways in which they are practised, contested, and negotiated in ‘rituals of migration’ (Pedersen and Rytter 2018).

To this end, citizenship ceremonies are an obvious object of study. In these ceremonies, we investigate how identity and the sense of belonging are ritualised, articulated, performed, materialised, experienced, and emotionalised as processes of transformation and becoming.

In my ongoing ethnographic study of citizenship ceremonies in a range of Western nations – Australia, Denmark, Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, and the United States – I focus on the different ways in which these rituals are practised.<sup>2</sup> I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation, interviews with organisers and new citizens at ceremonies in the aforementioned countries. Using comparative and contrasting strategies, I have analysed how different versions of citizenship are enacted at national, regional, and local levels. Moreover, the comparative perspective opens up to a more complex understanding of this cultural phenomenon, as it elucidates what is taken for granted or unthinkable in the different countries and highlights the different national and local styles in the organisation of ceremonies, and how they are practised and experienced by the new citizens. Even though we focus on two concrete examples in this paper – a ceremony in Sydney, Australia, and in Copenhagen, Denmark – the full study forms a comparative background for the analysis and discussions that follow.

Citizenship ceremonies form a kind of laboratory for articulating and materialising new forms of belonging in all their ambiguity and heterogeneity, which point to Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopias. Whereas utopias are unreal locations, heterotopias are real places in which utopias are enacted with great effect. However, heterotopias are ambiguous and are places ‘in which all other sites that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’. Further, Foucault articulates several types of heterotopia among which ‘heterotopias of ritual or purification’ are isolated spaces, penetrable yet not freely accessible (Foucault 2000).

Catherine Bell has elaborated the Foucauldian approach within ritual studies, and emphasises how an analysis of ritual transformation and becoming must focus on how rituals also empower those who may at first appear to be controlled by these rituals.

Processes of ritualisation always involve a patchwork of ‘compliance, resistance, misunderstanding, and a redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order’ (Bell 1992, 207–208). An understanding of how citizenship is enacted at citizenship ceremonies must therefore include both the organisers’ efforts to make the ceremonies emotional and memorable and the concrete citizens’ experiences and enactment of the rituals.

Furthermore, to elaborate a non-instrumental understanding of the rituals as negotiated and as matters of distributed agency, I have turned to performative understandings of processes of identity as something one does rather than something one has (cf. Butler 1993). This understanding has been further developed within Science and Technology Studies, and especially in versions with focus on how materiality is decisive when people *do* their selves: ‘Performing identities is not a question of ideas and imaginations devoid of materiality either. A lot of *things* are involved’ (Mol 2002, 37–38). Studying the pervasive and mundane acts by which identity – in naturalisation ceremonies, a new civic self – is performed must therefore also focus on the things or the materiality involved. In the following analysis of how citizenship is performed at naturalisation ceremonies, the analysis of rhetoric and discourse will be completed by a focus on the bodily practices and ways of materialising citizenship.

The speeches one hears at the ceremonies in different countries are fairly alike – although some interesting local differences occur, as recently investigated by British Byrne (2012). The discourse of citizenship is often a mixture of multiculturalist elements, and ethnic and civic nationalism, and certain rhetorical themes are recognisable. However, when observing what is actually done, eaten, sung, or presented as gifts, the differences are more striking. Highlighting the heterogeneity in the concrete doings of citizenship is also a way of emphasising the distributed agency, especially when it comes to the matter of emotions. I analyse emotions (the sense of belonging, for example) as material-discursive practices, because discourses on citizenship, identity, and belonging are heavily intertwined with bodily movements and specific practices for expressing emotions.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, emotions are not only discursive constructs in specific historical and cultural versions. They are performed in material, bodily, embodied practices, that are also always discursively shaped by previous articulations, by cultural categories, and by expectations. As such, emotions are matters of doing.

### Citizenship, integration, and emotional events

There has been an increasing focus on citizenship and civic engagement in recent years. Within the political field and in political theory, this is discussed in relation to migration, integration, and multiculturalism. In step with the transformation of the traditional nation state, citizenship is being explored as a potential focal point for societal cohesion, often in relation to neo-republicanism. Recently, it has been argued that citizenship has become the political catchword of the twenty-first century, encapsulating all that is considered ‘good’ (Mouritsen 2015, 7). At the same time, obtaining citizenship has become much more difficult in many countries due to constraints which have been introduced in an attempt to restrict immigration. In addition to limited access to citizenship, individuals applying for naturalisation are subject to an increasing number of tests, both to ascertain their language skills and, more recently, to test their knowledge about the country, its societal conditions, culture, and history.<sup>4</sup>

The politicians responsible argue that the formalised tests prior to naturalisation contribute to integration (in terms of participation) but as shown they also serve as mechanisms of selection and exclusion (Van Oers, Ersbøll, and Kostakopoulou 2010). This is in keeping with the shift in the general political climate and discourses from multiculturalism and politics of recognition towards conditional socio-political membership, the preservation of core national norms and values, and towards social cohesion (Van Oers, Ersbøll, and Kostakopoulou 2010, 1). Thus, one can observe a general shift from naturalisation being perceived as means for integration – as a step in the process for the legal and emotional completion of integration – towards the idea of ‘earned citizenship’; citizenship, then, becomes the ‘first prize’ granted to immigrants who achieve the required level of integration.

Alongside the tightening of regulations and limitations on the number of individuals who are able to achieve citizenship, citizenship has also been presented as being more valuable, as it is increasingly ritualised and officially celebrated in citizenship ceremonies. The point is that by ritualising citizenship, one creates an event that makes it memorable. Thus, citizenship and all that it entails of rights, duties, and responsibilities to the new fatherland acquires emotional significance for the new citizen. Several researchers have pointed out the paradox in citizenship being increasingly celebrated while, at the same time, losing its legal significance; a permanent residence permit grants the holder the same legal and social rights as citizenship, and even limited democratic rights (Brochmann 2012). Often, the right to vote in parliamentary elections and a new passport are the only perceptible differences experienced by those becoming citizens. As such, citizenship ceremonies are paradoxical phenomena.

Several old European nation states<sup>5</sup> have adopted traditions for naturalisation rituals in the twenty-first century, in different versions. By using comparative strategies to study this cultural phenomenon, we may enhance our understanding of the different versions of the ceremonies, and also how the same ceremonial ritual can be experienced and done differently by new citizens. There are two basic forms of citizenship ceremonies: (1) mandatory ceremonies, which constitute the formal and legal completion of the naturalisation process. The participants become citizens by participating in the ceremony, where they swear an oath of allegiance to their new country, and receive their citizenship certificate. Such ceremonies have taken place for many years in Canada and Australia and since 2004 in Great Britain, among other countries. (2) The voluntary celebrations, where, having received a letter confirming their new citizenship, the new citizens are invited to participate in a celebration, which is often arranged locally. Participation and, in some cases, the swearing in or presentation of a ‘commemorative document’ have no formal or legal significance. Such ceremonies take place in Scandinavian countries, among others.

In spite of the different ways in which the ceremonies are incorporated in the naturalisation process, the motivations for creating ceremonies are quite similar in different countries: they are meant to create ‘a sense of belonging’. That is, in Great Britain the idea behind the introduction of ceremonies was that they would give added significance to attaining citizenship and ‘provide an occasion at which the applicant, their family and close friends could celebrate a life defining moment’ (Rimmer 2007, 3). Since the first ceremony, local organisers have experienced how much the acquisition of citizenship means to the majority of applicants. Whereas the previous naturalisation process was purely bureaucratic and impersonal, the ceremonies are often ‘emotional events’ (Rimmer 2007, 3).

This vision of ‘emotional events’ and ‘life-defining moments’ is probably more ambitious than that which tends to be found in the Scandinavian voluntary ceremonies. Here, the welcoming and celebration of new citizens and of cultural diversity seem to be at the core of the initiatives. The idea is to make new citizens feel welcome, but also to mark the occasion with something special so as to make the event more memorable than the bureaucratic process of naturalisation, so that the rights and obligations of citizenship are felt more deeply. However, creating these memorable and once-in-a-lifetime events has also turned into an exercise in ‘emotional event management’ for the organisers who orchestrate the new rituals, primarily by mixing old and well-known ritual elements in new combinations.

If seen from the perspective of the three key dimensions to citizenship: (1) citizenship as a legal status – rights and obligations; (2) citizenship as activity and engagement in civic life; (3) citizenship as identity – loyalty and the feeling of belonging (Van Oers, Ersbøll, and Kostakopoulou 2010, 53–54), then citizenship ceremonies may primarily be associated with the third dimension in this list. However, in practice the three dimensions are entangled, and include the implicit idea that the emotional dimension is an important prerequisite for the active participation and loyal fulfilment of obligations that are required of all citizens. In any case, all three dimensions are recurrent themes in the speeches that are delivered at the ceremonies.

In my ethnographic study of specific citizenship ceremonies, I have not restricted my focus to the rhetoric of citizenship and identity, as already mentioned. Rather, I place equal emphasis on the specifics of how citizenship, identity, and sense of belonging are performed and materialised during the ceremonies (see also Damsholt 2009). Thus, a central aspect of the study is ethnographic description, focusing on bodily choreographies, along with materialisations such as information pamphlets, gifts, and more classic national and local symbols such as flags and food. All of these heterogeneous elements are involved in *doing* citizenship and identity. In the following, we see some examples of how cultural identity is articulated in speeches, materialised in gifts and entertainment, and finally, how specific manifestations are perceived by new citizens at two specific ceremonies: January 2007 in Hyde Park in Sydney, Australia, and in April 2006 at Christiansborg Castle (the Danish Parliament) in Copenhagen, Denmark. The two cases are chosen as they illustrate the two main versions of ceremonies: the obligatory ceremonies that constitute the formal naturalisation and the voluntary celebrations without any formal significance. However, as we will see, this difference does not create a qualitative divide when it comes to how the ceremonies matter emotionally and are practised by the new citizens.

### **Australia – It was a very emotional point for me singing the anthem**

Ceremonies have been held in Australia since 1949 and they are a mandatory component of the naturalisation process. The ceremonies ‘have an important symbolic role because they formally welcome new citizens from many cultures into the Australian family’, according to the homepage of the Australian Government. Such ceremonies are normally held in local town halls. However, on the Australian national day, *Australia Day*, 27th January, ceremonies are held in public spaces such as public parks, pedestrian shopping streets, etc. as an integrated part of the celebration. In Sydney, the ceremony is performed

on the stage of the central Hyde Park as part of the national day entertainment programme, but the ceremonial content remains the same in the ordinary ceremonies.

Australians primarily consider their country to be a migrant nation. However, the indigenous population – the Aborigines – present a challenge to this self-perception, and the reprehensible treatment to which they have been subjected (and to some extent still are) means that a form of recognition and apology in relation to this group is almost a fixed component of every introductory speech at Australian citizenship ceremonies. Similarly, the special Aboriginal flag is always present. On Australia Day 2007, the ceremony was not only introduced with the usual rhetorical salutation to the Aborigines; they were also materialised on the stage in the form of two individuals who, dressed in loin cloths and full body-paint, danced and sang in their native language. Despite their visible headsets, they brought to life every classic conceptualisation of ‘the native’.

After this introduction, the Lord Mayor gave a speech in which she emphasised that what is now Sydney was the first place occupied by the Europeans after the first fleet’s crews settled, but that the indigenous population had lived there prior to this. The Aborigines were portrayed as the true ‘custodians of the land’, and reconciliation with the indigenous peoples as a responsibility for all Australians. The new citizens were welcomed into the Australian nation, which was made up of migrants and descendants of migrants. However, the Lord Mayor stressed that the ideal was not an Australia in which diversity in backgrounds should be melted together into ‘one stew, all alike’, but rather that cultural diversity was a wealth that should be preserved and that freedom, diversity, and tolerance were Australians’ values. In this way, the new citizens were welcomed into a nation of migrants who were simultaneously contrasted to the indigenous population. Thus, the Aborigines are implicitly positioned as an anomaly as ‘non-migrants’, and, as such, as a group with whom the rest of the nation is obliged to seek reconciliation. This part of the ritual performance was obviously also aimed at the wider audience and to the ‘others’ to whom the migrant nation’s relationship needed to be defined and negotiated (cf. Baumann 1992, 109).

Several speeches followed, and then the swearing of the oath or affirmation in the aforementioned two groups. On that day, 25 new citizens from 14 countries were naturalised.<sup>6</sup> The new citizens were placed on chairs on the stage while their friends and families sat in front of the stage among the other spectators. The rest of the audience was made up of families and Australians of all ages who, seated on blankets and chairs, were celebrating their national day in the park. In addition to the official flag on the stage, the Australian flag was prominent, since on that day many people wear t-shirts and hats with the flag printed on them or in the colours of the flag, and the majority bring paper or plastic flags with them as part of their equipment for the day.

After the swearing of the oath or affirmation in groups, there were individual or family-group presentations of citizenship certificates and gifts on the stage. While the individuals or families were being called onto the stage, a short CV was read out loud for them, focusing on their country of origin and reason for applying for Australian citizenship. Compared to the European migration agendas, it was striking that there was no mention of what motivated people to leave their home country. The focus was entirely on the qualities of Australia that had attracted them. In some cases this was a spouse, but reasons such as the pleasant climate, the good educational system, or even ‘a wonderful gay community’ seemed to be completely legitimate reasons for becoming an Australian. The public



reading of these motivations often produced very personal and emotionalised versions of the migrants.

The new citizens were also presented with the customary gift bag for new citizens, which contained a book, a ballpoint pen, seeds from typically Australian plants, and information materials. For children, there is a soft toy and sometimes a flag. However, none of the interviewed new citizens mentioned these gifts as important. The only material object that was pointed out as important by some was the citizenship certificate in itself:

Well, obviously getting the certificate. Yeah, that is – I just sat there and looked at it for about a minute afterwards (...) Oh my God it's there – in black and white. So I would say that was the most important part for me. (New Australian citizen, male, country of origin Great Britain)

For this new citizen, as well as for many others, the certificate along with the oath materialised the actual ritual transformation. The ceremony was brought to a close with a musical performance, and finally the singing of the national anthem, led by a pop singer. After the ceremony, the national day celebrations continued on the stage and the new citizens, their friends and families, the organisers, and politicians moved to an enclosed area close by in the shade, for a more informal gathering and refreshments. In the official guidelines for holding citizenship ceremonies in Australia, the serving of food and drink is one of the areas with the most do's and don'ts. One of the recommendations is to avoid serving alcoholic beverages out of consideration for the participants from a non-drinking religious background. Nonetheless, at the ceremony, there were sparkling drinks in tall glasses, since the local organisers took it for granted that the participants could simply do without the champagne and opt for the alternatives of juice, coffee or tea, and for the small buffet with sandwiches and cakes.

All of the new citizens I interviewed and their companions were very satisfied with the event. However, there were variations in how deeply they were moved by it, as illustrated by the following evaluations from four different new citizens at the same ceremony:

It was great, just good fun. It was just typically sort of Australian, what I used to think – really. (New Australian citizen, male, country of origin Great Britain)

It was lovely, really lovely. Really, really special (...) It is an event and something you can remember, it's like one of those milestones in your life. (New Australian citizen, female, country of origin Ireland)

What is nice about it is that it gives you that moment of ceremony, where you actually are affirming your citizenship. (...) One of the greatest privileges about it is being able to vote. And to me that means being a stakeholder in the community and a citizen – having a responsibility for this place. (New Australian citizen, male, country of origin United States of America).

I think the oath was actually beautiful. I didn't think I would be emotional until I started saying the oath. (New Australian citizen, female, country of origin United States of America)

As illustrated by the first quotation, for some, the ceremony was simply a positive and entertaining experience, while for others it was a milestone to be remembered. It is the actual moment of ceremony that turns you into a citizen, because by affirming your loyalty by oath, you take on the responsibilities of citizenship. Thus, for some, the ceremony had an obvious emotional effect equivalent to the classic rites of passage. The

fourth quotation highlights how the informant was surprised by her own emotional response to this ceremony. As elaborated upon later in this paper, this is not unusual at citizenship ceremonies; on the contrary, it is a part of the way in which they are practised. The emotionalisation is not least of all due to the ways in which new citizens practice the ritual themselves.

Only one of the interviewees explained that she had been somewhat ambivalent towards the ritual:

I thought it was good, well, but I think it was a bit jingoistic and that is one of the reasons why I haven't become a citizen for ten years. I think that it's important to be an active part of your country, but I don't like that jingoistic – let's wrap us in the flag kind of stuff – that was coming up. (New Australian citizen, female, country of origin Great Britain)

Even though the Australian flag is the symbol of a nation of migrants, this new citizen considered the flag to be nationalistic when displayed too often. However, compared to Europe, it is particular to Australia that the official speakers did not articulate the migrant experience as something individual or unique, but rather as a distinctive feature of the Australian nation as a whole. Thus, the migrant experience was not only normalised, it was also 'nationalised' – and the indigenous population then turned into an anomaly. However, alongside the normalisation and nationalisation of the migrant experience, there was still an element of individualised emotionalisation:

I thought it was really touching. There were a few moments there, looking around amongst the row of new citizens; a lot of tears – you know – a lot of folks recognising this is the end of a journey and the start of a new one. But recognising all the steps we went through – the visas, the paperwork, the health exam and the decisions – the decisions about leaving your home, leaving your family and finding a new one. I think there was a lot of recognition of that, and that was nice. (New Australian citizen, male, country of origin Great Britain)

Although this new citizen described how he experienced the emotional reactions of the group of new citizens as a whole and how the ritual created an emotional peak in the transformation to being a citizen, it was nonetheless the end of an individualised or personalised journey. Thus, the emotionalisation was individualised: it was not so much the ritual's collective elements that were meaningful, but rather the personal (and perhaps familial) journey and transformation. This was also emphasised by the personal history and motivation that was read aloud, as mentioned, and by some of the new citizens performing a song or an acceptance speech. Several of the informants also emphasised the personal transformation as the key component of the ritual's emotional impact, as we see in the following three interview excerpts:

Probably to me the best part was actually seeing the Australian flag and for the first time it was actually meaning something for me. (New Australian citizen, female, country of origin United States of America)

It was a very emotional point for me, singing the anthem. (New Australian citizen, male, country of origin South Africa)

This ceremony was terribly – may I say – emotional for me. You know, my husband and I both became citizens and it is sort of a long-term commitment for us. (...) I think that probably singing the anthem was really important. In fact, we decided to learn it beforehand, not just to read it, because we felt that it was something we really wanted to do. So it was sort of –

probably – the main part of the ceremony for us. (New Australian citizen, female, country of origin Argentina)

For the first two informants quoted here, a familiar national symbol was experienced and ‘done’ in a new way, due to the emotional transformation materialised by the ritual. In other words, the flag as well as the identity had been transformed and emotionalised due to the legal and ritual transformation, but also as they were individually practised. Besides underlining the emotional intensity, the last quotation highlights that the new citizens’ own engagement in and preparation for the ceremony was also a central dimension of this emotional effect: ‘Something we really wanted to do’ indicates that the new citizens themselves made the ritual matter. This discussion of the ritual transformation as a matter of the new citizens own doing will be developed further following the presentation of the Danish case.

### Denmark – You can really feel that you have got citizenship

In the Scandinavian countries, formal notification of citizenship is transmitted by letter, and the participation in the citizenship ceremonies is optional. There are major differences between the ceremonies in the Scandinavian countries, where they have no formal significance. The Swedish and Danish ceremonies do not include swearing-in ceremonies but are rather informal public celebrations including an official welcome speech, entertainment, and refreshments. In Norway, citizenship ceremonies were first hosted in December 2006, with speeches and entertainment and included a new oath of allegiance composed for the occasion. In Sweden and Norway, the ceremonies are held locally, whereas in Denmark a national Citizenship Day is conducted at the Danish Parliament, Christiansborg, once a year for all newly naturalised Danish citizens and their spouses, but closed to the general public. The ceremony takes place in a big marquee in the castle courtyard with speeches, entertainment, and the singing of the national anthem followed by an ‘open house’ in the parliament building, where the new citizens are invited to meet the politicians face to face.<sup>7</sup> Here, information leaflets about the constitution and the EU are available to the participants, and the various political parties also hand out their own party pamphlets and balloons, pens, pins, etc. with logos in recognisable colours.

In 2006, several speeches were held in the marquee; some by the Master of Ceremonies, some by the Chair of the parliament, and some by a female television host with an immigrant background. The main themes of these speeches were democracy, the constitution, and rights and freedom, especially freedom of speech, although the audience was also urged to be considerate of others when exercising this right. At the same time, the new citizens’ obligation to protect these rights was emphasised, as was the idea that democracy is based on the will to demonstrate respect and listen to one another. The message was that ‘we are all Danes, albeit with different cultural backgrounds’. The audience members were encouraged to retain their cultural background, but also to be ready to accept a new culture. Thus, the migrant identity was normalised in the speeches. There were several entertainment performances in the tent, focused on Danish culture, although this was also approached with ironic distance, i.e. a poem was read aloud, which made a point of how many imported elements there are in the Danish culture and language.<sup>8</sup> The final item on the programme was the Copenhagen Boys’ Choir singing the national anthem, while everybody was asked to stand up and sing along.

As a unified Danish parliament was the host of the day, democracy was chosen to be at the core of the event, as formulated in the goals for the celebration: that the new citizens should glean from the experience that in Denmark, the divide between citizens and politicians is narrow and that they are citizens with democratic responsibilities and rights, and finally, the new citizens' democratic awareness should be increased (interview with the organiser, Christiansborg June 2006). Thus, the civic version of nationalism was dominant, and this was also performed by the fact that Christiansborg was completely devoid of flags and other national symbols on the day: only a single Danish flag was placed outside by the entrance of the building. However, the 'missing flag' was mentioned by several of the participants in the evaluation forms that were handed out. And certainly, the flag 'Dannebrog' is a ubiquitous necessity in Danish festive culture and it is taken for granted as an interwoven component of the fabric of everyday life, as is often pointed out (i.e. Jenkins 2011). In this sense, the new Danish citizens were well aware that the flag is one of the pivotal 'things involved in doing a Danish identity' (to paraphrase Mol 2002, 38). However, the flag's lack of physical presence was related to the strengthened symbolic value of the Danish flag in the spring of 2006. Due to the so-called Cartoon Crisis,<sup>9</sup> the image of the Danish flag that was present in the minds of most Danes at that time was that of the burning flag. It was probably due to this recent politicisation that the organisers chose to omit flags for fear that they may be interpreted as a provocation. Nevertheless, the absent Dannebrog became even more present, conspicuous, and emotionalised as it was 'manifest absent'<sup>10</sup>.

On the second Citizenship Day in 2007, Danish flags were handed out by the Social Liberal Party.<sup>11</sup> However, these flags were a special version of the Dannebrog, which emphasised democracy or civic rather than ethnic nationalism, as the red rectangles in the flag were made up of the text of the Danish constitution, printed in red ink.<sup>12</sup> However, it was not only through the absence of national symbols on the first Citizenship Day that the attempts to make Christiansborg appear neutral and only national in the civic version became apparent; the refreshments served were also neutral. Coffee, tea, and one kind of cookie were served in all of the offices in which the political parties hosted the ceremony in the tent. The minimal nature of the refreshments was due to economic considerations and to ensure that the parties did not compete to serve the best refreshments. As such, the refreshments materialised an egalitarian and democratic ideal. However, several of the guests expressed a desire for better refreshments.

Another area that failed to satisfy some of the participants was the gifts. One element that was common to nearly all the ceremonies observed was the individual presentations of gifts to the new citizens, which they could take home as a memento, materialising their new identity. However, in Denmark, there were no individual elements and no ceremonial presentation. The constitution, information materials and pins, pens, key rings, etc. were laid out on tables so that the new citizens could help themselves. However, this self-service arrangement did not provide the same sense of being individually appreciated and acknowledged. Thus, some of the participants also wanted a more ceremonially presented gift:

It is fine that they have made this kind of group event, but I thought there was a bit more to it. For example, they could give out the Danish constitution to the people who attend today. You know, something so that you can see that you took part in the day. That is just lacking,

something or other so that you can see that you have been there (...). They could have done that. After all, some people come all the way from Jutland. (New Danish citizen, male, country of origin Turkey)

Thus, the informant viewed the presentation of gifts from a reciprocal perspective: the new citizens have attended and thereby demonstrated their goodwill by spending time and money for their own long journeys, but they did not get a materialised and tangible proof of this 'gift exchange' in the form of a gift in return (see Mauss 1990). The Danish constitution was actually laid out on one of the self-service tables, but being able to take home the constitution yourself is not a 'gift' in a ritual or reciprocal sense. It must be presented as a special and individualised gift, materialising the participation in an object, which could be taken home and shown off – as an emotionalised memory object. This seems to be especially important at the voluntary ceremonies, where there is no certificate to materialise the ritual transformation into citizen. Thus, in Norway, a special gift book is presented, and in Sweden, a 'letter of commemoration' – with no formal significance – is presented to bring home.<sup>13</sup>

However, in Denmark no such gift is given. Instead, many participants tried to create a more individual memento and 'evidence' of their participation by asking for a photograph with one of the politicians who were present. Thus, they remade the ritual according to their own wishes. Many of them highlighted this 'meeting at eye level' as the best part of the day:

I mean, I have never been a patriot, because that is not me. Because I have not had a citizenship for a long time, but today I felt that wow, Denmark, I live here and I have everything I dreamt of. It is a fantastic country. And to see the politicians themselves, you know? Because it is one thing to see them on the television, but it doesn't bring out the same feelings because then you are standing making food, and keeping one eye on the screen. But here you see them and they were one hundred per cent at your disposal. (...) The very best thing is that you can personally greet the politicians and ask some questions. And also their reactions when you come up to them; it was not like they looked the other way as though they didn't see you. The fact that they were very friendly and willing to answer your questions, that was really nice. (...) That was the best thing about it, I think. (New Danish citizen, female, country of origin Estonia)

Thus, it is not only the more formalised and obligatory swearing in that can have a strong emotional effect. For the informant quoted above, the emotional effect came from being seen, being recognised, and from the embodiment of the short distance between citizens and politicians. It was the concrete experience that the politicians' welcoming attitude was not only rhetorical but is also physically enacted; when they did not look the other way but instead gave the new citizen their undivided and warm attention. The concrete and personal meeting with politicians and Danish democracy were integral to the way in which the ceremony was staged and how it was expected to work. It was also via these elements that the new citizens experienced being emotionally moved, and as such they performed the ceremony in a version that matched their individual desires. With regard to the ceremony, the same informant said that, 'you can really *feel* that you have got citizenship' (my emphasis). The personal meeting with democracy made citizenship into something concrete and tangible, something that could be felt – in this way, citizenship became emotionalised by the participants own doing.

Another important dimension of the ceremony for many of the new Danish citizens at Christiansborg was hearing positive experiences and speeches regarding the migrant identity:

I didn't know that she [the speaker of immigrant descent, ed.] was an immigrant too. It was good that there were some examples from people who have a position in society; who have become something even though they come from elsewhere. I think that it is a good thing. (New Danish citizen, female, country of origin Morocco)

Thus, the speech by a prominent person from an immigrant background had a dual function; she was a kind of immigrant role model, because she had done well for herself in Danish society, and she also understood how to articulate the migrant experience as well as having to deal with multiple cultural identities. Another new Danish citizen also mentioned this speech in her evaluation of the citizenship ceremony:

The way that she said (...) that being integrated and being part of Denmark is the most important thing, but that you can be yourself and hold on to some of your own things and your own background and still be a Dane. I thought that was really good. (New Danish citizen, female, country of origin Uganda)

In many of the interviews, informants emphasised the importance of people with actual experience of being a migrant articulating how they were able to cope with their own hybrid identity; how one can be 'a Dane and an immigrant' at the same time. While these role models normalise the migrant identity, seeing so many other Danish citizens with diverse cultural backgrounds was also mentioned as important.

The cultural diversity in the population as a whole and the appreciation of this diversity was a recurrent theme in the positive evaluations by the new citizens. Some also pointed out that this was in strong contrasts with how immigrants are received in everyday life. The overarching impression was that they were happy or even overly enthusiastic about feeling welcome and accepted into society. Since the ceremonies are voluntary, one could, of course, argue that these statements are unsurprising as they came from individuals who had chosen to participate.<sup>14</sup> However, it was not only the new citizens who were enthusiastic. In the interviews, some of their companions also expressed their pleasure in response to the more inclusive version of the country that was performed at the ceremonies:

As a native Dane, I also think that it is reasonable to welcome our new citizens in the proper way; (...) I feel that we do so when new members join our families, you know? The same applies to the larger family of Denmark, doesn't it? (Female Danish citizen, companion to new Danish citizen)

Similarly, in a subsequent interview a participating politician from Christiansborg spoke about how 'the Denmark we want to see more of' was visible at the Citizenship Day. For many of the participants, it seems that the country appears in a more inclusive version in the citizenship ceremony. At the same time, the more nationalist or hostile voices in the Danish debate on immigration were present – or manifest absent – as an implicit counterweight or something that can be held at a distance for a moment by hosting a welcoming reception for the new citizens. In the ritual, new citizens as well as some of the politicians enacted or remade the nation into a more civic version.

In this sense, the citizenship days in Denmark are comparable to Foucault's concept of heterotopias, as real places in which utopias are enacted and materialised even if ambiguously and in 'isolated spaces, penetrable yet not freely accessible' (2000). The citizenship ceremonies in Denmark resemble such an isolated space, where at the same time a utopian or welcoming version of the Danish society is enacted; celebrating and including its new



members. Furthermore, the ritual constitutes a paradox, when considered in the perspective of the general immigration policy in Denmark. Here, the agenda involves increasing restrictions and exclusion, and problematisations of immigrant's loyalties to a much greater extent. With its democratic and inclusive focus, the ritual at Christiansborg more or less contrasts the country's normal policy in this area. It sidesteps the more hostile debate around immigration.<sup>15</sup> The ritual appears to 'simultaneously represent contested and inverted' (cf. Foucault 2000) versions of Danish citizenship and, thus, to be heterotopic. It seems to be implicitly concerned with negotiating relationships with the absent Danish public or the 'invisible Others' that are implicated in the ritual to follow Baumann (1992, 109)

The democratic focus and toning down of the ethnic version of nationalism is, from a comparative perspective, that which is remarkable about the Danish citizenship ceremony, especially because this characteristic does not match the tone of the public debate about national identity of the past decades. However, at Christiansborg, where the parliament is the host and must therefore join together in support of the ceremony, democracy has become the common ground upon which everyone can agree. Even if one could argue that this is a paradox or a case of 'nationalised democracy' or democracy versioned as a 'special Danish phenomenon', it still works as a common ground that nobody questions. Thus, in the Danish case, it is democracy that is emotionalised, as it is personalised via the individualised encounter 'at eye level' between the new citizen and the politicians present.

### Ritual agency and emotionalisation

One characteristic that is shared by both examples is that migration (perhaps only on the day itself) is normalised by, among other things, the speakers sharing their own experience of it. Thus, a common thread in the speeches is that the migrant identity is articulated as something that does not necessarily jeopardise a sense of belonging and loyalty towards the new country. Migrants and natives are recognised as equal citizens with equal importance. However, in spite of these shared characteristics, there are also remarkable differences in the ways in which the migrant experience is normalised. In the case of Australia, as I have described, the whole nation is considered to be a migrant nation and thereby every individual – and every new citizen – is just one more example of a general identity. However, this turns the indigenous population into an anomaly. In Denmark, in contrast to this strategy of normalisation, personal experience and role models are emphasised as the native population is seen as the norm. Thus, normalisation is more a matter of recognising oneself in individual and successful immigrants and of being 'seen and acknowledged' as an individual and democratic subject, in a face-to-face encounter with national politicians.

In general, it is difficult to say anything definite about the voluntary ritual's long-term effects, and whether they transform identity. The individual new citizen's background and motivation for having applied for citizenship seem to play an important role in relation to the significance they place on citizenship, and it also seems that the powerful emotional significance of the ceremony that several informants emphasised was often linked to their past. This is also in line with the way Verkaaik (2010) characterises different types of participant behaviour at Dutch ceremonies, i.e. as dependent upon the participants' background. If a new citizen has arrived to the country as a refugee from a war-torn

homeland, the new state may symbolise the secure and good life, and the new citizen may well have a sense of gratitude towards the country and the societal order that is able to guarantee security in the long term. For those with such a background, the ceremony becomes an emotional moment and an occasion for the participants to demonstrate the loyalty and gratitude that they feel they owe the new state in return for their new life. In this way, the rituals are enabling emerging becomings; by performing the ritual, the new citizens are inventing and performing themselves and their social environment in a new version.<sup>16</sup>

The extent to which the rituals in and of themselves have an integrative effect is difficult to evaluate. Clearly, the effects of the ceremonies cannot be isolated from the other elements in the administration of citizenship, and can therefore not be measured. Most of the new citizens whom I asked did not believe that the ceremonies would make a difference in the long term or have any practical effect on their daily lives and integration. However, many of them emphasised the important symbolic significance of the ceremonies, and one could discuss the extent to which the emotional side of citizenship – feeling welcome and part of the community – should also be considered as an important aspect of the feeling of being integrated, even though it is not this element of integration that gets the new citizen a job or an education. It is likely that the sense of belonging and being welcome is an important point of departure when it comes to being an active participant of the community.

In the introduction to this paper, I listed citizenship's three dimensions and stated that the ceremonies primarily speak to the emotional or identity-related aspects of citizenship, since they have no real practical significance. However, the identity-related perceptions of citizenship as a symbol of affiliation with the new society are often entangled with the more practical reasons that, at first sight, appear to be the most important motivating factors for applying for a new citizenship, i.e. a passport or the right to vote. Citizenship ceremonies become one of the occasions, perhaps the most significant of them, in which the symbolic and emotional dimensions of citizenship primarily are enacted. As argued in this paper, 'a lot of things are involved' in doing identities within a performative approach. And many new citizens state that they were surprised by the strong feelings they experienced at the ceremonies in the encounter with classic national artefacts such as flags and by doing a ritual performance like singing the national anthem. However, rather than speaking about an instrumental emotionalisation on the part of the organisers, it is important to stress that it is most often the new citizens' own involvement and actions that moves them. Even if rituals 'produce and require the performance of emotional display' (Byrne 2014, 175), this emotionalisation of citizenship is also a matter of the new citizens' own ritual agency and doing.

The introduction of ceremonies in an increasing number of countries may be considered to be symptomatic of an increasing emotionalisation of citizenship, in order to ensure cohesion, unity, and a sense of belonging, since the emotional significance of citizenship is considered to be a guarantee for loyalty and the desired civil awareness. In relation to this, it is interesting that the national and democratic dimensions of the ceremonies often have the strongest emotional impact, rather than the multicultural aspects and the rhetorical veneration of the hybrid migrant experience. However, although the ceremonies are emotionally meaningful to many new citizens, there is no basis for claiming that this is an unequivocal effect. On the contrary, there are many participants who experience them as a necessity (if mandatory) or simply as a fun event, and also many – in the countries where they are voluntary – who choose not to participate.



In any case, the participating new citizens try to (re)make and do the voluntary and obligatory rituals in ways that make them matter, as many expect and hope that these rituals will materialise the transformation many of them have so desperately wanted – from unwelcome immigrants to recognised and welcome citizens. This is primarily reflected in their applications and hard work to qualify for citizenship, but also in the concrete preparations for, and actions during, the ceremony. They expect and desire ‘a life-defining moment’. Thus, it is the emotional aspects of citizenship – the sense of belonging and of being recognised – that the rituals primarily manage to address. And the invitation to participate gives the new citizens who wish to perform this aspect of citizenship an opportunity to do so.

Despite the fact that many of the participants express surprise at their own emotional response, one might also say that they hope to ‘feel’ that they have become citizens and, not least of all, to feel that this is not only a personal or individual matter but that it also relates to the state and group of people of which they are becoming a part. Many of the new citizens want to feel that they are a part of the community and that they are a welcome addition. They want a reciprocal (emotional) response and effect. Thus, there is also a strong desire and expectation among the new citizens and their guests that the society should enact itself in an inclusive version in the ceremony, so that they may feel welcomed. In this sense, the citizenship ceremonies are also concerned with negotiating the newcomer’s relationships with the implicated wider public – with the ‘invisible Other’. These rituals of migration make up a kind of heterotopia, in which a utopian version is enacted in reality – if only for a short while.

## Notes

1. What it means to be Australian, Danish, etc. forms, in itself, a complex, ongoing, and contested discussion in the countries in question. These discourses on national identity are highly relevant contexts for understanding the ceremonies. Nevertheless, a thorough examination of these discourses would exceed the format of this article.
2. I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork at ceremonies in Sydney, Australia, January 2007; in London 2006 and 2007; in Lund and Stockholm; Sweden in June 2006 and 2007; in Oslo, Norway, in December 2006; in New York, U.S., in July 2009; and in Copenhagen Town Hall 2006, and at the Danish parliament’s ‘Citizenship Day’ in 2006, 2007, 2011, and 2012. All interviews with new citizens have been conducted right after the ritual during the more informal parts of the ceremonies.
3. For a more elaborated study of emotions within a performative understanding, see also Damsholt (2015).
4. One example of this is the Danish ‘naturalisation test’, which was introduced in Denmark in the spring of 2007.
5. That is, the U.K., Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark.
6. I did not have the chance to interview them all, but (as in the quotes to be presented) new citizens with a background in commonwealth countries were dominating the group.
7. The first national ‘Citizenship Day’ was held in the Danish parliament, Christiansborg, in March 2006 and has been repeated on an appropriate spring Sunday every year since then. In 2006, around 7000 new citizens were invited and about 1400 participated with a companion of their own choice.
8. The poem ‘Global citizen in Denmark/Verdensborger i Danmark’ by Benny Andersen.
9. The Cartoon Crisis, in which ironic drawings of the Prophet Mohammed printed in a Danish newspaper, led to protest demonstrations, the burning of flags and embassy buildings around the world, and a heated debate in the Danish media.

10. John Law defines the 'manifest absent' 'as the necessary Other to presence, which is enacted along with the latter, is constituted with it, and helps to constitute it' (Law 2004, 157).
11. 'Det Radikale Venstre', one of the most immigrant-friendly parties in Denmark.
12. At the Danish citizenship days I attended in 2010 and 2012, national flags were handed out to all the participants, just as is the case in Stockholm, Sweden.
13. At least that was the case in Lund 2006 and in Stockholm 2007.
14. However, the overall impression is similar at the obligatory ceremonies in England and Australia where I conducted fieldwork.
15. As is also the case in Amsterdam (Byrne 2014, 173).
16. For example, the discussion of Yurchak's insights in Verkaaik (2010, 77).

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